



2006/07

**APPLICATION GUIDELINES
FOR
EARLY LEARNING WITH FAMILIES @ YOUR LIBRARY
USING CHILD DEVELOPMENT KNOWLEDGE TO ENRICH LIBRARY SERVICES**

**Application Deadline:
August 25, 2006**

**Funding Source:
Library Services and Technology Act
California State Library**

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"Families may be big, small, extended, nuclear, multi-generational, with siblings or not, with one parent, two parents, grandparents or foster parents. Families live under one roof or many. We become part of a family by birth, adoption, marriage, or from a desire for mutual support. A family is a culture onto itself with different values and unique ways of realizing its dreams. Together, families become the source of our rich cultural heritage and spiritual diversity. Families create neighborhoods, communities, states and nations."

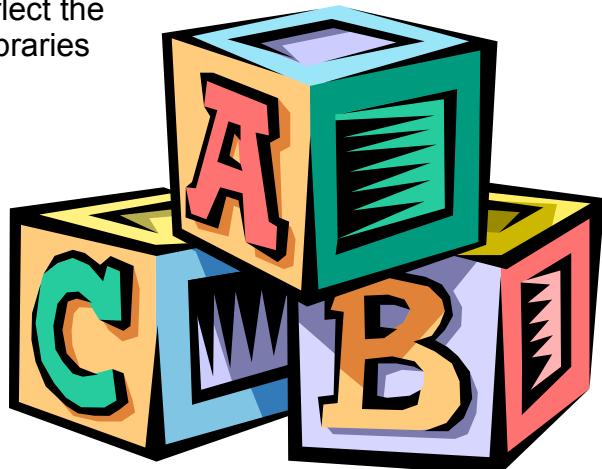
(Adapted from the New Mexico Coalition for Youth and Families, 1990.)

Philosophy

Public libraries are important community centers with the ability to reach families, caregivers, and childcare providers from all walks of life. Libraries serve their communities as resource centers and bridges – conveying important information, facilitating access to a wide array of resources and services, and helping families and the community get their needs met. Libraries also serve a vital role as community partners in the lifelong learning of their citizens. For these reasons, public libraries are uniquely positioned to provide supportive, family centered early learning environments and services that delight and inspire, helping our very youngest citizens, their families and subsequently our communities, reach their full potential.

Early Learning with Families (ELF) is founded on the recognition that children's development unfolds in stages and that these stages, especially during the first five years of life, are highly impacted by the kinds of environments and experiences to which young children are exposed. Furthermore, families are children's first and most powerful teachers with the ability to dramatically influence their children's early experiences and settings. Unlike service systems whose personnel fluctuate, the family (parent or caregiver) is the constant in a child's life. Research has shown that parent/family involvement in a child's development and education is more important to that child's eventual success than family income or education. When experiences and surroundings delight in inquiry, encourage discovery, invite play, and nurture parent/child bonds, they naturally lead to children's development and learning.

The *Early Learning with Families* initiative is intended to help libraries become just such places for the families in their communities – where library programs are built upon partnerships between families, caregivers and library professionals where information is shared and family expertise and diversity are valued; where programs and activities acknowledge that no single approach is right for all families; where programs reflect the ages and stages of child development; and where libraries serve as facilitators of families' self-discovery and mastery. In this way, libraries can become places where learning begins as a way of life – and lasts a lifetime!



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Values

- Public libraries are community hubs – connecting people, organizations and resources. They are uniquely positioned to expose families to a wealth of resources to support their children's early learning and development.
- Early language, reading and writing development begins in the first five years of life and is closely linked to a child's earliest experiences with words, books and stories.
- All children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn. Children's physical, social, cognitive and emotional development is understood as interrelated. Development in one area affects and is affected by development in others.
- Children's development unfolds along individual pathways that are often uneven across developmental areas, with peaks and plateaus leading to new peaks.
- Every child is recognized as an individual with unique abilities, personality traits, learning styles, interests, needs, background and ways of responding to the world.
- Young children develop and learn best when they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, they feel psychologically secure and they have positive interactions with other people.
- Early environments matter and nurturing human relationships are essential.
- Families are children's first and most powerful teachers. Their strengths and resources are highlighted, not their deficits, and their diversity and expertise is respected.
- Learning opportunities for parents and caregivers are varied and responsive to parent/caregiver needs, including both informal and non-traditional approaches.
- For young children, play is valued as the primary medium for social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development and learning.
- Public libraries are in a unique, neutral position to embrace and explore cultural diversity.
- Choice and flexibility are in abundance.
- Collaboration with families and community partners is embraced as a valuable source of learning and creativity.
- Family and child empowerment is key and is reflected in library policies, programs, partnerships and environments.
- Children's librarians and literacy services are especially skilled at introducing families and their children to the magic of the written word, the joys of storytelling, the wonder of books, and the value of language in nurturing young children's development.

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Guidelines

1. Although the State Library would ideally like to assist all interested libraries with the Early Learning with Families (ELF) initiative, there is a limited amount of funding available, which restricts the number of libraries that will be selected for funding.
2. Libraries that are new to the concepts of early learning and have yet to restructure their Children's Services accordingly, are the intended audience of the regional trainings and first year implementation. If interested you will need to:
 - Apply.
 - Commit to attending one of the three ELF regional trainings. Send a library team of three representatives to participate in the training including: a representative from Children's Services, Literacy, and Library Administration (travel costs to be covered by this grant). Training dates are:
 - #1 October 23-24 (South)
 - #2 November 1-2 (Sacramento)
 - #3 December 6-7 (South)
 - Commit to implementing at least one aspect of an early learning model as presented at the ELF regional training by the end of the fiscal year. This may include, but is not limited to: programming, collections and resources, community collaborations, policies and procedures, and/or library environments. ELF Philosophy and Values should serve as the framework for any implementation plan undertaken.
 - Develop an implementation plan and budget as part of the ELF regional training, and submit to the State Library for review and funding as a small LSTA mini-grant. You may also include other sources of funding in the scope of your plan.
 - Identify ways to reach families and engage them as participants in this initiative, including current library users as well as underserved populations (e.g., low-income families, teen parents, etc.) who may not currently be library users.
 - Complete 1 mid-year and 1 final report regarding progress and lessons learned.
3. ELF is intended as a joint venture between Children's Services and Library Literacy Services or a community literacy agency (where no Library Literacy program exists). A demonstrated commitment to working collaboratively must be in evidence in the application.
4. ELF is broader than Families for Literacy and is intended to create services for all families, rather than just adult learners. Its purpose is to offer models and strategies for basing library services on children's developmental stages. Applicants must be familiar with and willing to integrate the ELF Philosophy and Values into your service plan. Your understanding of these values and their influence on services to young children and their families should be reflected in your application responses.



5. Libraries that are already well versed in early learning theory and actively engaged in providing such services will be invited to provide input and feedback regarding the development of:
 - regional trainings;
 - a statewide ELF information sharing network and website;
 - resources materials that support early learning library efforts;
 - promotional materials and an ELF branding identity;
 - an outcomes tool for evaluating ELF library programs;
 - expanded community partnerships and collaborations; and
 - year two priorities for this initiative.

These libraries will not need to formally apply but will be invited to participate as Advisory Committee members based on the submission of the Family Centered Early Learning survey distributed on May 30, 2006.

6. All resources developed through the ELF initiative will be made available to all California libraries.

ELF Initiative Goals

- Increase number of families, young children (0-5), and childcare providers who actively utilize library services, with a special emphasis on reaching high-need, at-risk populations.
- Increase parent and caregiver awareness regarding their role as an influencing agent on their children's first five years of formative development.
- Increase parent and caregiver behaviors and skills that promote early learning and literacy skills in their children.
- Increase community awareness of the library as a resource on early childhood development and parenting.

Benefits to Children's Services

- Increase utilization of children's services.
- Increase community awareness and appreciation for the role of libraries in meeting the needs of families with young children.

Benefits to Literacy Services

- Increase utilization of literacy services by families who may not seek out literacy services otherwise.
- Increase the perceived and actual inclusion of literacy as a mainstream part of library services.

Benefits to Families and the Community

- Increase parent and caregiver confidence in supporting young children's early development, learning and literacy skills.
- Enhance the lives of young children and increase their likelihood of eventual school and life success.